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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ISLAMABAD 000888

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [MARR](#) [EAID](#) [PK](#)
SUBJECT: PREPARING FOR THE LONG HAUL

REF: A. ISLAMABAD 870 (NOTAL)
[1](#)B. ISLAMABAD 237

Classified By: CDA Gerald Feierstein, for reasons 1.4 (b)(d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. As promised, the Pakistani military began anti-militant operations in Lower Dir April 26; the Mission will monitor activities on a regular basis to keep Washington apprised of this positive turn of events. However, based on actions over the past year, we should be prepared for a long, slow campaign with frequent setbacks. We should not expect any sudden GOP disavowal of the Swat deal or Nizam-e-Adl as the civilians slowly work to gain political consensus for this new push against extremists. Materiel support and positive encouragement from the U.S. will reap the most rewards in the long run. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) The Mission shares Washington's concern at the speed at which the Pakistan-based taliban militants were moving through Malakand District in the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP). While some taliban have publicly retreated from Buner, there are strong indicators that a substantial local militant presence remains in the district. Sufi Mohammad and implementation of the Nizam-e-Adl Regulation which tends to generate large amounts of publicity is a sideshow that in many ways simply distracts from the real dangers posed by Sufi's son-in-law Mullah Fazlullah.

[1](#)3. (C) As we examine the strategies of the Pakistani military and the militants, and the lack of an overall coordinated GOP strategy to build popular support for fighting extremism, we should anticipate this will be a long, slow fight with frequent setbacks.

Strategies in Play

[1](#)4. (C) Chief of Army Staff General Kayani has consistently maintained since last summer that he has a campaign plan to retake the FATA, beginning in Bajaur and working south to the Waziristans. Indeed, we have been surprised by the unanticipated determination the Pakistanis have demonstrated since August in regaining control of at least the population centers in Bajaur in phase one of their plan. Kayani's efforts are hampered by both troop limits and capability problems. The Pakistani Army and Frontier Corps have approximately 110,000 troops in the tribal areas but they lack COIN training; on any given day, only two-three of their Cobra attack helicopters are operational. Kayani's strategy was to compensate for those weaknesses with a phased campaign plan. He would exploit inter-tribal rivalries (Commander Nazir vs. Baitullah Mehsud) and use a peace deal in the

Waziristans to keep that area quiet until he had consolidated control over the rest of FATA.

15. (C) Last August, the Pakistan military began operations against militants in Bajaur but they did so only after having to fight their way out of a militant ambush. Despite successes, after almost a year, the Army/Frontier Corps have yet to control fully Bajaur Agency, although they have continued operations into parts of Mohmand and Orakzai Agencies and were planning operations in Kurram Agency before the latest taliban moves into Malakand. The GOP's definition of "control" effectively means the limited control the government historically has had in FATA of key roads and population centers; there has been no GOP expectation of completely clearing militants of an area. In fact, Kayani does not have the forces to leave behind as the "hold" piece of his counter-insurgency strategy, and Tehrik-e-Taliban leader Baitullah Mehsud effectively used the peace deal as space to launch fighters across FATA, NWFP. and into the settled areas of Pakistan. The Dir operation launched April 26 is welcome news, but the reality is that we will not see a substantial change in the balance of power until the military threatens Mehsud's base of operations in Waziristan, possible this summer.

16. (C) After a barrage of suicide bombings in 2007 in response to the GOP's military operation against the Red Mosque in Islamabad and a scare that militant/criminal forces would overrun Peshawar last year, Mehsud has been shifting his strategy. He appears now to be bypassing Peshawar to concentrate on attacking GOP police and security forces in

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FATA, NWFP and the heart of Punjab. His goal continues to be to spread chaos and undermine popular confidence in the government. He has been supported by other groups, including Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, which reportedly supported the attack on the police training academy in Lahore, and Jaish-e-Mohammed, which reportedly is taking over Barelvi madrassahs in southern Punjab to churn out more suicide bombers.

17. (C) Militants have concurrently exacerbated sectarian tensions (especially in Kurram Agency), threatened and attacked girls' schools, barber and CD shops, and increased support for extremist madrassahs in the FATA. They have increasingly attacked, with limited success so far, U.S./NATO coalition supply routes in Khyber Agency. More recently, they have exploited the TNSM-NWFP government deal in Swat to expand influence over Malakand, with the apparent goal of cutting off northern NWFP/FATA and threatening the Peshawar-Islamabad motorway.

Slow Civilian Reaction

18. (C) Meanwhile, civilian leaders are trying to strengthen political support for military action without sounding like a government in panic mode. The National Assembly has not yet taken up the bruited all-parties resolution supporting military action; PM Gilani is touring the country, presumably building support for an all-parties conference in the coming weeks. Privately, the Awami National Party-led NWFP provincial government is telling us that the Swat deal with Sufi Mohammed is dead, but that does not necessarily translate into a public funeral or canceling implementation of the Nizam-e-Adl Regulation. Other than the Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM) that dominates Karachi, no political party has come out publicly to oppose the Swat deal.

19. (C) Nawaz Sharif is trying to have the best of all worlds--supporting Nizam-e-Adl while criticizing President Zardari for losing control to the militants. Leaders of the Jamaat Islami and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam religious parties, embarrassed by Sufi's pronouncement that Islam and democracy are incompatible, nevertheless continue to support the Swat deal. Opposition party Pakistan Muslim League privately

supports action against the militants but will not publicly denounce Nizam-e-Adl. Therefore, we expect the GOP to let the Nizam-e-Adl die without ever announcing its demise; they still do not want the responsibility for killing the Swat deal.

Next Moves

¶10. (C) Kayani is moving forces from the Waziristans into NWFP and seeking USG intelligence, logistical, and border-coordination support (Ref A) to launch what are promised to be major operations. Each time he juggles limited forces, however, he exposes another area to militant exploitation. As government determination to confront extremists becomes clearer, we expect the militants will retaliate by launching additional suicide/attacks on GOP security forces in major cities, will take advantage of the withdrawal of forces from Waziristan for additional actions, and will continue to seek control of major north-south and east-west roads in FATA. Tensions already are high in Hangu after taliban encroachments there, and ICRC reported April 27 hearing reports that the taliban were continuing to move east into Kohistan. Upcoming conflict may produce up to one million internally displaced persons. Privately, civil society leaders tell us they fear the taliban will increase targeted assassinations against those who speak out.

¶11. (C) The taliban and their extremist supporters continue to exploit widening socio-economic rifts in FATA, NWFP and the feudal areas of Sindh and southern Punjab (Ref). In Swat, they reportedly have begun a land redistribution campaign to reward the traditional have-nots (Fazlullah and his supporters) by seizing land and houses from the elite (most of whom have fled). They also have set up a marriage bureau, promising young recruits benefits both in this life and the next. In the words of one observer, "the taliban are offering a salary, a gun, a pick-up truck, a bride, and paradise--what government can compete with that?"

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¶12. (C) Comment: Despite this sober assessment, post is encouraged that both the military and civilians finally are acknowledging the taliban threat and taking steps to contain it. We do not anticipate immediate or dramatic changes in the situation on the ground. But, as noted in Ref A, the Pakistanis are sounding new and welcome notes of determination, and we should respond by delivering our own slow and steady stream of both materiel and positive encouragement.

FEIERSTEIN